



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

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ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

Testimony on SB 83, 121, 165
Senate Committee on Labor, Elections and Urban Affairs
Tuesday, August 28, 2007

Chairman Coggs and members

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in favor of three proposals I have introduced this session that I believe will help all working families in Wisconsin. Senate Bill 83 exempts all unemployment compensation from state taxes. When a family is struggling to pay their bills with the loss of employment, I don't think the state should be taking more money out of their pockets. We should be doing all we can to help them get back on their feet. This bipartisan legislation will provide a little more help to families struggling through the economic hardship of job loss.

Senate Bill 121 was introduced on behalf of Teamsters Local 75 to remedy a situation that recently occurred in Brown County.

After over two years of bargaining with Brown County, the union and

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the county went to interest arbitration. After arbitration, the county took the union's dues check off away. They had taken the arbitration rights away in the summer of 2004 after contracts had expired in December, 2003. During this time, the union was reduced to filing prohibitive practice charges for minor infractions but was left with no ability to protect their members from discharge during this time. They were, in effect, "employees at will" even though they were represented. While the dues check off was taken away, members were required to pay their dues directly to the local union without payroll deduction. While the union is now trying to convince Brown County to recoup the delinquent dues from the employees, the county is not complying. This is all unreasonable because both taking away the dues check off and denying the grievance arbitration procedures is aimed at union busting. Neither helps the employer in any way other than putting a hardship on the union. This gives the employer an advantage over the union in bargaining. The dispute resolution process was put in place to avoid strikes. This loophole only fuels tension between employees and their employers.

Senate Bill 121 closes this loophole by making it a prohibited practice under MERA for an employer or an employee to end any grievance arbitration agreement during a contract hiatus and for an employer to end any fair-share agreement during a contract hiatus.

And finally, Senate Bill 165, the Equal Pay Enforcement Act. This legislation is long overdue and I very much appreciate your and the committee's consideration, Mr. Chair.

SB 165 is needed because Wisconsin families lose more than \$4,000 per year due to unequal pay. While women nationally earn approximately 77 cents on the dollar compared to men, here in Wisconsin women earn 75% of that earned by their male coworkers. Wisconsin ranks 39th nationally on this issue.

The Equal Pay Enforcement Act sends an important message about the value that we, as a society, place on the efforts of individual workers. People deserve to be fairly compensated for putting in a hard day's work. We need to find ways to make sure people are paid in a fair and equitable manner for being productive, contributing

members of our workforce and to encourage policies that help working families become independent and economically secure.

The wage gap is not going to correct itself quickly, or without our intervention. The wage gap has narrowed, on average a half a penny per year over the 30 years since the federal Equal Pay Act was passed. The Equal Pay Enforcement Act will allow the Department of Workforce Development to order payment or damages in cases of employment discrimination. This bill also directs the Secretary of DWD to appoint a committee to study the issue of wage disparities between men and women and between minority group members and nonminority groups.

It is time for the State of Wisconsin to return to its progressive roots and set an example for the rest of our country.

The Equal Pay Enforcement Act will ensure that wages are based on skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions, and not race or gender.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members. I'd be happy to answer any questions.